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## Artists' retreat

**Creative couple lives in quiet comfort**

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New Brunswick author Beth Powning was born into a literary world. Her grandfather, a professor of Victorian Literature at Brown University, always read poetry at family gatherings. There were a number of famous authors in her small New England town. Some were family friends. The young Powning would have tea with children's book author Esther Bates.

It's no surprise that, with a pedigree like that, she decided that she wanted to become a writer. She studied at Sarah Lawrence College in New York State and graduated with a degree in Creative Writing.

Powning has written extensively for Canadian magazines; her books include *Edge Seasons*, *The Hatbox Letters* and *Shadow Child*. Her latest novel, *The Sea Captain's Wife*, a gripping tale of a 19th-century sea-faring family, has won acclaim from critics all over North America.

She is also involved in a literacy project and is teaching online. Her other love is organic vegetable gardening and thinks one day she might expand her gardens into a commercial operation.

Powning invited Star Spaces into her home.

Q: How would you describe your home in two words?

A: Eclectic, comfortable.

Q: Tell us about your home.

A: It is a Victorian farmhouse built in 1870 located near the Bay of Fundy. It is 2,800 square feet. It has high ceilings, big windows and elegant mouldings. Special features indoors (include) lovely curving staircases, two spacious rooms downstairs made by removing walls (living room and dining room), a glassed-in sunroom we added off the kitchen and a screened porch we added on the north side, with a French door opening onto the dining room.

On the outside there are flower beds everywhere, window boxes, a kitchen herb garden, vegetable gardens and a gazebo made by my husband that frames perennial beds.

Q: What attracted you to this space?

A: Quiet, remoteness and a gorgeous physical setting.

Q: Who shares your home?

A: My husband (well-known Canadian artist) Peter and ponies in the barn.

Q: What is your favourite room and why?

A: The kitchen — it is truly the heart of the home. There's a Waterford Stanley wood stove from Ireland, frequently used (that plus solar panels heats our water); wide pine floorboards; granite countertops; shelves holding pottery; and dried wildflowers, onions and garlic in braids. It reflects the fact that I grow most of our own food. There is usually a feather or stone on the window sill from a recent walk.

Q: How would you describe your decorating style?

A: A mixture of family antiques—mirrors, rocking chairs and beds from the late 1700s and early 1800s — and contemporary art. Lots of wood — no rugs on the floors; the original spruce subfloor was sanded and varnished. Lots of natural light — no curtains. I love the lines of the house to show, the bulging walls (there's no wallpaper, all the walls are the original plaster).

Q: What is your fondest memory in this home?

A: I love our Christmas Eves, when we light the house entirely with candles and dress in tuxedos and gowns for dinner. It is always magical.

Q: What's the one item in this house you can't live without?

A: The kitchen wood stove.

Q: Weekends at home, what are we most likely to find you doing?

A: In winter, going on long cross-country ski expeditions and then reading or watching movies in our living room, where there's a wood stove and dark blue walls to make us feel cozy.

Q: If your walls could talk, what would they say?

A: That they have seen the shift from oil lamps to electricity, witnessed the advent of telephones and computers, watched an amazing passage of people, enjoyed many exuberant feasts, dances and concerts, and listened to the calm peace of family evenings.

